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Recommended Citation

Austin, H. M. (1986) Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation and the Environment of the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries on H.R. 3358 Reauthorization of the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act and S.B. 1813 to Amern and Extend the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act. Marine Resource Report No. 86-2. Virginia Institute of Marine Science, College of William and Mary. <https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.25773/v5-3aj2-yq60>

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
AND THE ENVIRONMENT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES
ON
H. R. 3358
REAUTHORIZATION OF THE ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS CONSERVATION ACT
AND
S. B. 1813
TO AMEND AND EXTEND THE ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS CONSERVATION ACT

BY

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27 February, 1986

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Herbert M. Austin, I am the Chairman of the Department of Fisheries Science at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science of the College of William and Mary. I also represent Virginia on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Scientific and Statistics Committee for striped bass. I appreciate the opportunity to speak this morning on House Resolution 3358, a Bill to reauthorize the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act; and Senate Bill 1813, a Bill to amend and extend the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act.

I support the reauthorization of the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act for the period 1 October, 1986 through 30 September, 1988 as proposed in H.R. 3358. This Bill strengthens the Act by recognizing the management authority of the District of Columbia and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission over fisheries within their jurisdictions. Further, while I recognize the importance of Federal budget cuts, I believe funding for the Emergency Striped Bass Research Study should be continued.

We have made significant progress in understanding the dynamics of the striped bass stocks during the last few years with funding from the Emergency Study. While we still have not conclusively determined the cause or causes for the decline we are beginning to understand how fishing pressure, and man-made and natural environmental fluctuations interact to effect the ability of the stock to reproduce. We have also come to recognize that the reproductive success is river specific. This success is generally up Bay-wide, except for the Head-of-the-Bay in Maryland.

Unfortunately, it has been this area of the Bay that has carried, according to the Maryland Juvenile Index, the stock over the years.

Continued funding for the Emergency Study should include monitoring of juvenile production and, adult fishery mortality, and should focus on the failure of the Head-of-the-Bay to have demonstrated any recovery.

The states, working through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Interstate Fisheries Management Plan for striped bass, have demonstrated an ability, with Federal "encouragement", to work together on a common problem of fisheries management; and while progress was slow at the start, ground has been broken for cooperation and I am pleased with the indications that the stock may be recovering. Virginia's rivers in particular, have shown a generally favorable juvenile production since 1981.

The addition of the Potomac River Fisheries Commission and District of Columbia to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission further strengthen the Interstate Plan. The Act, as it stands and is proposed for extension in H.R. 3358, will continue a growing state-Federal partnership for interstate fisheries management.

I would also like to comment on Senate Bill 1813 which would expand the role of the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior. As proposed, S.B. 1813 would significantly weaken the states' role in the partnership. It would, in fact, remove all state authority and provide the Federal Government with the precedent mandate to manage fisheries within state

waters. This precedent must not be taken lightly, and before being allowed to occur, should stand the scrutiny of considerable open debate.

Further, S.B. 1813 does not provide continuing support for the Emergency Study. So it not only removes the states' ability to manage, but it also cuts their support, and subsequent ability to understand the stock and fisheries. The Department of Commerce (National Marine Fisheries Service) has, at the 1985 Annual Meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, stated that their research focus will be in the Fisheries Conservation Zone, in support of the information needs of the Regional Councils, and not in the coastal waters in support of interstate management. We cannot manage effectively without knowledge.

In closing, I wish to restate my support for H.R. 3358, and my concerns should S.B. 1813 pass.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.